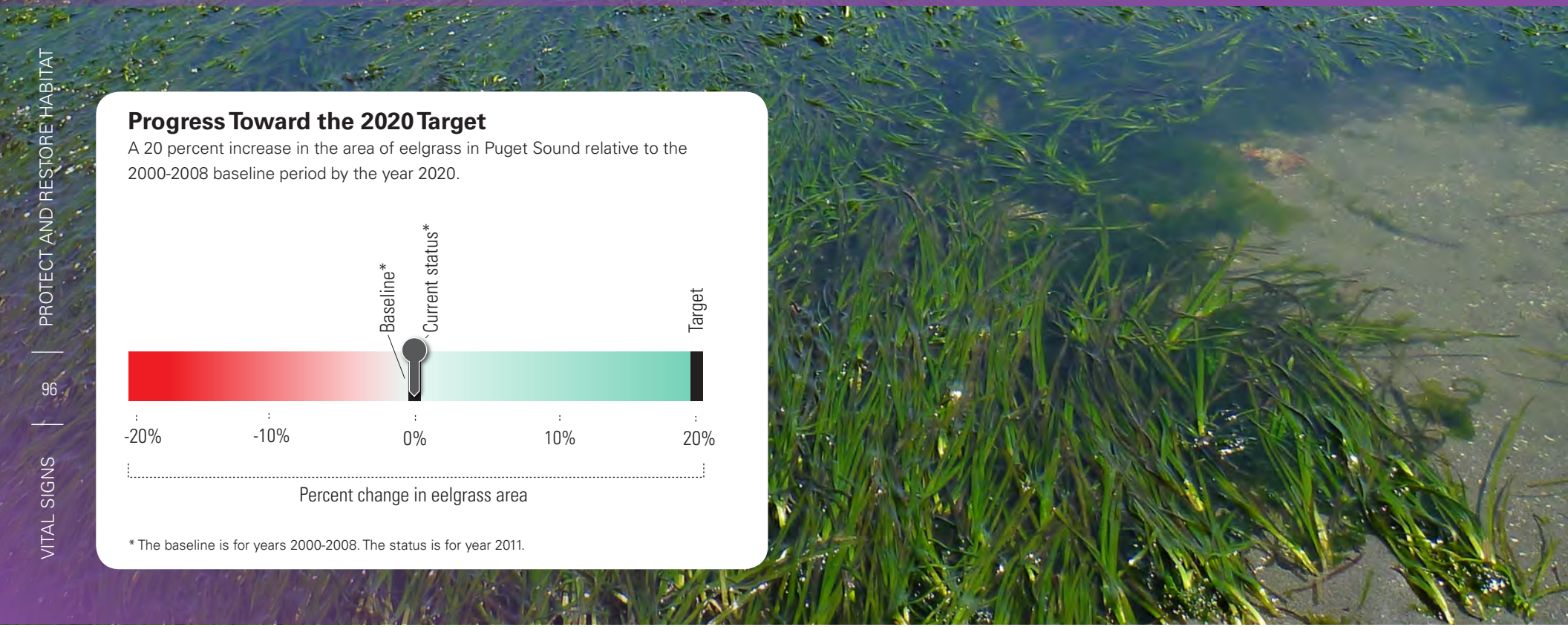
Eelgrass

Eelgrass area



Progress Toward the 2020 Target

A 20 percent increase in the area of eelgrass in Puget Sound relative to the 2000-2008 baseline period by the year 2020.

* The baseline is for years 2000-2008. The status is for year 2011.

Is There Progress Toward the 2020 Target?

There has been no progress toward achieving the 2020 target of 20 percent more eelgrass in Puget Sound.

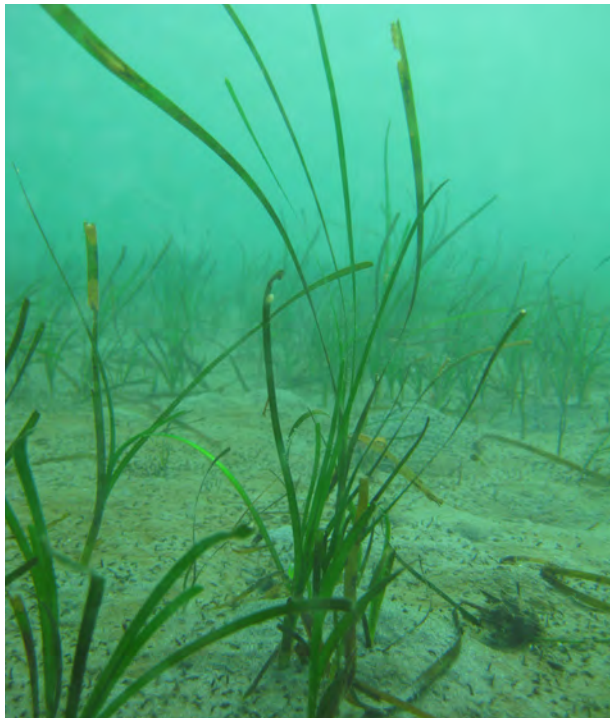
The overall area of eelgrass throughout Puget Sound has not changed relative to the 2000-2008 baseline period. In fact, we may be losing eelgrass because there are more eelgrass monitoring sites that are declining than sites that are increasing in area.

A total of 244 sampling sites across Puget Sound were classified for eelgrass area trends in 2012. The majority of sites were stable, meaning that no eelgrass area change was detected (213 sites). There were 19 sites with decreasing eelgrass area (including 5 sites of total loss) compared to 12 sites with increasing area. However, trends are not uniform across Puget Sound and there are notable differences among regions.

The Saratoga Whidbey Basin shows an encouraging increase in eelgrass area. In other parts of Puget Sound, there are signs that eelgrass beds adjacent to wetland restoration projects are increasing.

Regions of highest concern for eelgrass area and health are Hood Canal, the San Juan Islands, and the southern Central Sound, where many declines are seen. Although the exact causes of these eelgrass losses are not known, scientists suspect that nitrogen pollution is an important factor.

Eelgrass is an important barometer of the health of the Puget Sound ecosystem and this underwater vegetation acts as critical habitat for salmon and Dungeness crabs. Ongoing monitoring shows that the goal of a 20 percent increase in eelgrass area by 2020 cannot be met with current management practices: the stresses on eelgrass in Puget Sound must be significantly reduced to create gains in eelgrass area and health.



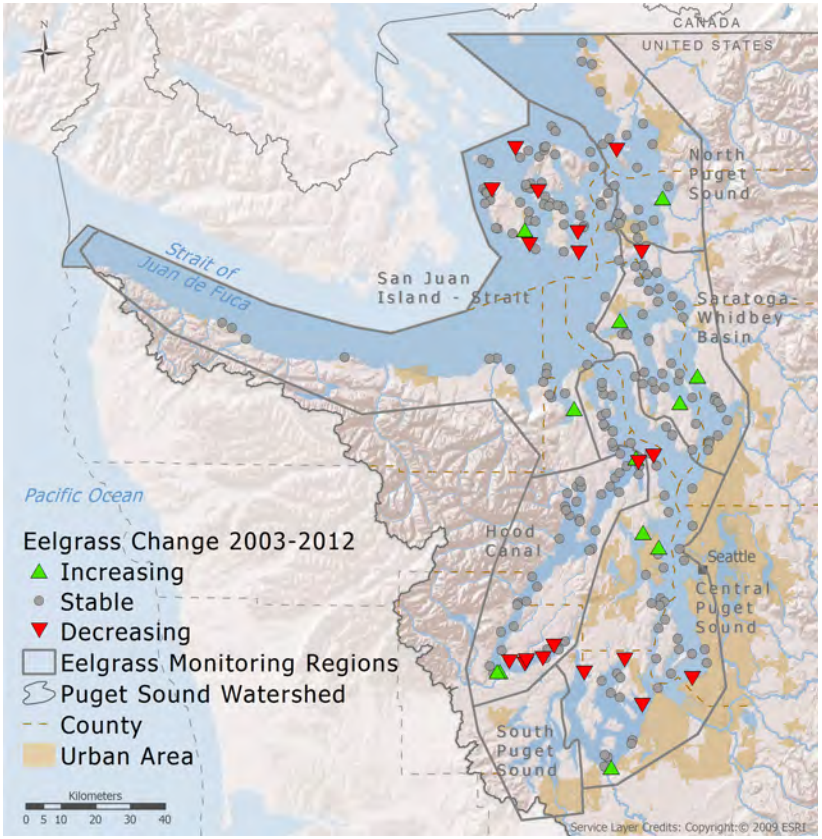


Figure 3.12. Eelgrass monitoring sites in Puget Sound, characterized by whether eelgrass beds are stable, increasing, or decreasing.
Source: Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Program

Indicator Lead:
Fred Short, Washington State Department of Natural Resources

For more in-depth information, please see:
www.psp.wa.gov/vitalsigns/eelgrass.php

photo spread credit: Washington State Department of Natural Resources